

Sailors, Marines and

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Two Sailors in Hawaii were arrested for speeding more than 130 mph, a dangerous behavior that has become all too common. Before that incident, three Hawaii-based Sailors were seriously injured in an auto mishap caused by a civilian who, while racing, lost control of his vehicle and hit the Sailors' vehicle. The civilian and his passenger died of their injuries.

"Speed kills, plain and simple," said CMDCM(AW/SW) L. R. Cruz, Navy Region Hawaii command master chief. "We saw it in the 60s and 70s. Now, Sailors in our younger generation are going through the same thing."

There's a new message out, though, detailing stiff punishments for the current crop of Hawaii-based Sailors who get stopped for speeding—on base or out in town. Consequences include revoked base-driving privileges. "Driving on base is a privilege, not a right," said Cruz. "If people don't respect that privilege, we will take it from them."

If convicted of reckless driving in Hawaii, a

person can receive a wide range of punishments. A state judge decides whether to impose fines, jail time, or both to anyone found guilty.

The problem, according to CMDCM(SW/SS) Mark Marshall, command master chief for USS *Port Royal* (CG-73), is a "culture of speed. If you have a Sailor involved in that culture, and he or she drinks and drives, you have a dead Sailor. Statistically, it's just a matter of time."

For Sailors who still feel a need for speed, Cruz said, "There is a place to fulfill it without misusing public roads [referring to a local track]." He added these thoughts about those who would use the highways of Hawaii as their personal playground, "You don't do it [race or speed] on a public roadway because of the danger to our community. Don't be selfish. Think of others who could be injured or killed because of your breaking the law."

Commander Navy Region Hawaii, RDML Barry McCullough, said it this way in a message to all commands under his jurisdiction, "Racing

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Their *FAST* Cars

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and excessive speeding will not be tolerated from our Sailors. It is up to us as Navy leaders to do everything possible to ensure our Sailors are not involved in another senseless fatality or injury on our highways."

Unfortunately, the problem of speeding and racing isn't germane just to Hawaii—it's everywhere, and young Sailors and Marines are part of the difficulty. Consider these examples:

- A 23-year-old Sailor in a 1993 Hyundai was racing a shipmate in another car down a Virginia interstate highway when he lost control. His Hyundai ran off the road, hit a jersey barrier, and rolled several times, ejecting him. He was pronounced dead at the scene. Meanwhile, a 23-year-old passenger [also a Sailor] in his car suffered only minor injuries.

- Two young Sailors borrowed a friend's Acura Legend and went drag racing in California. While traveling about 80 mph in a 35-mph zone, the car slammed into a light pole and burst into flames, burning both victims beyond recognition.

- Elsewhere, a 20-year-old Sailor and her friends started drinking at a nightclub about 2300 one Sunday. Three hours later—at closing time—they left for home. The 20-year-old decided to drive a car belonging to one of her party friends because that friend acted drunk. Meanwhile, she had another partygoer drive her car. Both drivers headed to an interstate, where they started racing

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at speeds faster than 100 mph. The 20-year-old lost control of the car she was driving, crossed two lanes of traffic, left the road, spun, and hit some trees rear-end first. The air bags didn't deploy, and the seat belt didn't save her.

Like Hawaii, California has decided to do something about illegal drag racing. The police department in one major California city organized a unit of full-time undercover detectives. With the help of city council, this unit has reduced the number of races, as well as the number of spectators. The city council passed a law that allows police to seize and to sell cars used in illegal drag racing. The council also passed a law that makes being a spectator at a drag race a crime, punishable by six months in jail and a \$1,000 fine.

Another California city council has attacked the problem by marking the curbs of popular racing streets as no-stopping zones. This action allows police officers to impound every car that is trapped when they move into position to stop a night of racing.

Sundown doesn't mean it's time to swap your military job for that souped-up car you own—the one you use to prowl city streets, looking for a drag race. Too often, this scene ends with screeching tires, twisted metal, and mangled bodies. ■

JO1 Daniel Calderon, Commander, Navy Region Hawaii public affairs, contributed to this article.